

# HUGH GRANTLEY'S VALENTINES

BY  
KEITH GORDON



"Who brought it—this hamper?" he demanded excitedly, confronting the old butler at the door. "Call him back. Don't stand there staring! Call him back, I say!"

Peter, his mind totally upset by his master's excitement, started to go—turned back—started again, and then came to a full stop.

"It's no use, Mr. Hugh!" he quavered at last. "It's no use, because the man came in a sleigh and started off again 'fore I closed the door."

His master stared at him in speechless impatience for a moment, then turned back to the table where the baby still lay, a veritable sleeping beauty in miniature.

"Send Mary to me!" he directed briefly, and, moved by some impulse that he could not explain, he reached out and drew off one of the absurd little bags that served the infant for mittens.

As the tiny pink and white hand, with its fingers curled tender, lay in his great brown one, a strange thrill traveled along his spine. He had never dreamed of a touch so utterly appealing. His intention of sending for the authorities to come and remove the child melted like snow before the sun. A very wonderful thing had happened.

Hugh Grantley had fallen in love for the first time in his life—not with a woman, but with a helpless, pink and white morsel of humanity. If, five minutes earlier, he had felt only a fierce resentment at the impudence that had foisted this child upon him, he now felt that he would fight, if need be, to retain it.

"Please, sir, I am here," said the voice of the housekeeper. Grantley dropped the baby's hand as if he had suddenly found it a live coal, and, with the air of a man emerging from a dream, he remarked with a non-committal air:

"Oh, yes!" Then he remembered why he had sent for her and continued as naturally, as Mary remarked to Peter afterward, "as if having babies left at the door was an everyday affair."

"Take it to your room, Mary, and see if you can find any mark on its clothing—any clew to its identity."

In an incredibly short time she returned, but not before he had determined to keep the boy at all hazards.

"I could find nothing, sir—no mark of any kind," she said, laying the child back in the hamper as if it were wanted to get rid of it before she incurred any responsibility. "The clothes are fine, but very plain, and there's no mark of any sort upon them."

"Why doesn't he wake up?" demanded Grantley abruptly, struck by the fact that through all of this commotion the child had continued to sleep.

"I think it's been drugged, sir. But she's a beautiful child, sir. She—"

"She!" was Grantley's horrified ejaculation. "You don't mean to tell me it's a girl!" and the dismay of his tone was enough to make the fates themselves repent of having played so low a trick upon a man whose dominant trait had always been his shyness of women.

"A girl!" he repeated limply.

The whole fabric of his dreams was shattered in a moment. One couldn't go traveling about the world with a girl. One couldn't hunt and fish and smoke with a girl! Obviously, since the child was a girl it would have to be turned over to the authorities.

But no sooner had he reached this conclusion than a revulsion of feeling came over him. He felt again the exquisite touch of that tiny, rose-leaf hand, realizing that its hold upon him was but the stronger for what he had learned. He fancied now that he could

feel the tiny fingers clinging to his. Without further hesitation he sat down and dashed off a note to his cousin's

widow. Would she come at once, with the bearer, to advise him in a very pressing matter? And so it was arranged that the child should remain as

Hugh Grantley's ward. It was St. Valentine's night again,



PETER WITH THE PRIVILEGE  
OF AN OLD SERVANT  
SUGGESTED SLILY  
"PERHAPS IT'S A VALENTINE  
MR HUGH"

but the days that had come and gone between that distant evening and the present one seemed to Hugh Grantley like the links of a long, bright chain.

Loosely speaking, it was Valentine's eighteenth birthday, and the old Grantley home, once so quiet and deserted, now wore an air of gay festivity in honor of the event. Soft lights flooded the rooms, greenery and blooms transformed it into a charmed place.

In the library the master of the house, whose gray hairs but made him the more distinguished, sat once more before the fire, lost in thought. Owing to that physical perversity that sometimes makes a man appear old when he is young and youthful when he is middle-aged, Grantley looked but little older than on that fateful night eighteen years ago.

Still something of the old sadness gripped his heart. Love had stolen upon him when he thought himself immune. Though he did not confess it even to himself, in the depths of his soul he knew that he loved Valentina, not as a guardian or father, but as a man loves the woman he could make his wife.

There was a rustle of skirts behind him, like the passing of a breeze, and two soft hands were pressed gently over his eyes. They felt like rose leaves, but every nerve in his body trembled at the touch, and with set teeth he prepared to play his part. She must never know.

"Guess now who holds thee?" commanded a laughing voice, and Grantley, with an inward "Steady, old fellow," replied in questioning tones, to the humor of the lines—

"Death?" There was something electric in the air. Was it the beating of her heart that he could hear or only the mad throbbing of his own? Would she finish the quotation?

With a mighty effort he tried to steady himself—to remember that to her he must seem an old man.

With lingering slowness the soft fingers trailed away from his eyes and at the same time he heard the girlish

voice saying—a trifle unsteadily,

"Not death, but love."

There was a vibration in the voice that he had never heard before—a tone at once triumphant and ashamed. He opened his eyes and faced Valentina with a face drawn and rigid with feeling.

"I don't understand you," he said slowly—sternly, and before the severity of his manner she drooped like a flower in the frost. But only for a moment. Then her head went up proudly and her eyes met his with the old childish confidence.

"I love you," she said simply. But Grantley had himself well in hand now, and he spoke in a manner at once elderly and paternal.

"My dear child—"

Before he could go further Valentina stopped him.

"Please let me take the little case that you carry in your left breast pocket," she demanded.

A guilty blush overspread his face. So she knew, then, that he carried there a baby's mitten, turned to the shade of old ivory with age.

"I am too old for you, my darling," he said brokenly—but in another moment she was in his arms, protesting that it was she who was so disgustingly young.

"But how did you know, dear?" he questioned later, when they had disposed of the question of years and gray hairs. "How did you know that, against my judgment and in spite of myself, I loved you?"

"I came down to the library late one night for a book. My slippers made no sound and—"

And so for the second time in his life St. Valentine brought a great happiness.

## VINY'S VALENTINE.

By Ortho B. Senga.

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MISS VINY PERKINS closely scanned the stock of valentines, giving careful perusal to the verses attached. There were the usual rhymes about hearts and

darts, and love and dove, but none seemed to please her.

"What's the matter, Miss Viny, can't you find nothin' you like? She'll have some more in tomorrow, some with lace paper, all rigged up like a bay-window."

"Well, I'll come in again," and Miss Viny passed lingeringly out of the little country store.

"I don't s'pose any of 'em would say just what I want," she murmured thoughtfully, as she went up the lane. "I wish I could make up some po'try myself, then I'd have somethin' that'd hit the mark."

The thought seemed to please her and she hurried into the house.

"As soon as I get dinner over and Jason starts for the gristmill I'll put my mind onto it. The idea of a full-grown man bein' so scart as Silas Simpson—it's time somebody took him in hand!"

Well for Miss Viny's peace of mind that she could not know that a similar remark was at that instant being made by Silas Simpson's sister.

"It's time somebody took you in hand, Silas Simpson; here you've been goin' to see Viny Perkins for nigh on to eleven years. Why don't you spunk up and ask her?"

"Well, Mandy," chattered Silas, defensively, "I've been kinder tryin' to lead the conversation up to it—"

"Humph!" Mrs. Thompson ejaculated, derisively.

"I've been into the store to-day lookin' at valentines," affirmed Silas, still on the defensive.

"Valentines!" uttered his sister, with stinging sarcasm, "you'd better hang yourself for a valentine. 'Twould be the smartest thing you could do."

The sarcasm was lost, but the idea found lodgment in the slow-moving brain of Silas. Meadville customs demanded that a valentine must be attached to the knob or knocker of the front door, and the giver was supposed to be entirely unknown to the fair recipient. Any sighing swain who sought the aid of Uncle Sam in conveying his tender missive would have been deemed cowardly, to say nothing of the opinion that would have prevailed, from an economic standpoint, regarding the purchase of stamps for such a purpose.

The more Silas thought of himself as a valentine the more attractive he considered the idea. He went about, filling the woodbox and doing the other chores requisite on the approach of a cold night and fancied himself a shivering Cupid, with wings and arrow and bow.

"That'll settle it," he exclaimed happily, unconscious that he was speaking aloud, "if Viny takes me in, why I'll be her valentine—if Viny takes me in."

"Yes, and then she'll be taken in," muttered Mrs. Thompson, giving the biscuit dough an extra poke, adding hastily, as if repenting her momentary disloyalty, "however, Silas is a mighty good provider, if he is slow, and a pleasant spoken man, take him by and large, never lived."

Mrs. Thompson would have been reluctant to confess that the probably lonely state of Jason Perkins, in the event of his sister's marriage, had often preyed upon her mind, and that as often she had thought of herself as being a likely person to succeed Miss Viny as the mistress of Jason's fine old home and broad acres. Arid, fairy castles, under which no solid foundation of reality could ever be placed unless

Silas could be "braced up" to a proposing point.

That night an inquisitive moon, rising soft over the hills, looked down into the peaceful valley, and the moon was the only one that saw Silas Simpson as he hurried toward the Perkins farm with his sister's big pillow clothes basket over his shoulder. The curious moon veered around the big pine tree and watched Silas as he adjusted the ropes that were attached to the handles of the basket over the doorknob, arranging for the basket to rest on the upper step.

"A most singular proceeding," commented the watching moon.

But at Silas' next move the moon nearly collapsed, for Silas pinned a paper to his coat sleeve and, doubling his awkward body into the basket, reached up and clanged the big brass knocker.

Alone in the bright, warm kitchen, Miss Viny started to her feet at the sound of the knocker.

"A valentine!" she exclaimed; "well, I'll give 'em a chance to scoot. I don't want to catch nobody."

She went slowly through the sitting-room into the entry and, pushing back the bolt, essayed to open the door. It was apparently held from the outside. Grasping the knob with both hands, she gave a tremendous pull. The door flew open, bringing the basket with it, and emptying its contents in an undignified tangle at Miss Viny's feet.

"For the land sake!" she cried, "whatever possessed you, Silas Simpson?"

Silas scrambled to his feet and pointed to the paper on his sleeve, which bore in large letters the name, "Miss Viny Perkins."

"I knew I'd never get my courage up to offer myself to you in any other way, Viny, and so I thought I'd be your valentine."

"And a pretty mess you've made of it, as usual," said Miss Viny, sharply. He raised his head manfully; something very tender, almost noble, came over the dull features and straightened the awkward body. "I shan't make any blunders in lovin' you and takin' care of you, Viny," he said simply.

A strange, new feeling of submission crept into Miss Viny's heart.

"You come in here, Silas, and I'll show you what I made it myself," she added, as she handed him an envelope addressed to "Silas Simpson."

He drew out the sheet of paper carefully. A big red heart was pasted at the top and the lines below were in Miss Viny's cramped, but legible, handwriting. He read aloud slowly, in a high-pitched, sing-song tone that in his school days had always been reserved for poetry:

If Silas Simpson me will wed,  
No further groans or tears I'll shed.  
But hurry 'round, as best I'm able,  
To cook his meals and set the table.

Now, Silas, speak, and I'll say "Yes."  
No need of waiting long, I guess;  
A month from now and I'll be ready  
To hold your hand before Parson Steady.

"You cut out that heart?" he said, hesitatingly, putting a thick forefinger on the scarlet representation.

Miss Viny nodded, watching his face with unwonted timidity.

"But the verses—they ain't yours, be they?" in an awed tone.

"Yes, they be," affirmed Miss Viny, tasting for the first time the delights of authorship.

Silas gazed at her in silent admiration.

"I writ 'em in a hurry," she explained modestly (Oh, the trail of the serpent!), "mebbe I'd taken more time—"

"Viny," interrupted Silas with conviction, "I never seen any better po'try in print."

## HIS PARTNER'S COMPACT---By Izola L. Forrester

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"ELL, it's the last straw," exclaimed Willfred. She pushed away the mass of cord and wrappings from in front of her and stood erect, tall, girlish and indignant.

"I can't help his being my godfather, or the fact that papa took it into his head to bestow his name on unborn me, boy or girl, willy nilly. But it's a perfect shame for him to send me such stuff and call it a valentine."

"It's your own fault, sis. You never answered his letter, so he thinks you're a boy. He's a bully shot all right."

Ralph bent admiringly over the dead black-tail buck on the floor. "See that neat hole, sis?"

"Oh, don't Ralph. It's horrible." Willfred walked to the window and looked out at the wind-swept park with angry eyes. "If I'd have known what was in the box I should have sent it back unopened."

"For why?" Ralph laughed with the joyous practicability of 15. "It's fine eating, and you'll have the horns, too. The old boy's a peach. Wish dad had named me after him. He probably thinks you're a youngster bachelor about 19, and tickled to death over having real game sent to you. When's he coming?"

Willfred glanced at the letter, which she had crumpled in her hand over the first shock of surprise.

"He says he will have the pleasure of dining with the family on Valentine's eve, and thinks that afterward he will let me show him the town, as he has not been in New York for seventeen years."

"Whew!" whistled Ralph. "Antique, isn't he?"

"Must be about 50 or 60," said Willfred, disconsolately. "I hardly know anything about him. He was father's godson in the first place, and the son of father's partner who died. So father gave him his first start out West, and when I came along he was my godfather by proxy, and no one ever heard of him afterward until I got that letter last week. I had no idea he was coming on."

"It's too bad you aren't a boy, Will," he said with regretful cheerfulness. "But as long as you're not you'll have to stand it, and so will Mr. Willfred Norman. Maybe he'll like you just the same."

"I don't want him to like me," Willfred said. "Never can tell when a fellow goes West how he will turn out. Better not get sassy."

"Oh, it isn't that. You can't understand!" She paused vaguely.

"Yes, I do, too," retorted Ralph. "You're worried to death for fear he'll come here and find out we're as poor as Job's turkey."

"I'm not."

"Yes, you are, too. And you're afraid the old boy'll kick up a rumpus because there's just you and mammy and me living here, keeping bachelor's hall, and you're working yourself to death on a newspaper for a living. Why don't you write and tell him that the football team you're halfback on has a match on with Cleveland and you won't be home for two weeks?"

Willfred shook her head resolutely. "No. I'll see him, and we'll ask him to dinner and thank him for his old dead deer, but that's all. I won't listen to a particle of dictating from him."

Valentine's eve was clear, it had stormed all day and cleared at night-fall. Willfred was tired from the day's work and with a pleasurable perversity declined "dressing up" as Ralph termed it.

"Better make a good impression," he

counseled sagely. "The old boy may be afflicted with enlargement of the heart and leave us a legacy. Anyhow, you don't look so bad, Will, in a skirt waist."

Willfred smiled at his tone of serious consolation and took a swift glance at herself in the mirror over the mantel. There was more than a chance of making a good impression in the reflected figure, trim and business like in black and white, without even a bit of chiffon to give a touch of femininity.

The electric bell buzzed sharply in the hall, and Ralph bolted for the door. An instant's reconnoitering over the banister, and he put his head back for a final stage whisper.

"Here he comes, sis. Look pleasant, please."

Willfred listened. Somebody was asking for Mr. Willfred Gray. And Ralph, the traitor, had said, "Yes, sir," and was ushering him in without explanation. She rose at sight of the figure in the doorway, and a wave of embarrassment swept over her. She had thought of him as 50, a general study in iron gray, with disposition to match. He was not over 35. Tall and fair, with a sturdy Saxon fairness, and gray eyes that met her own in amazement. From the hall came the sound of Ralph's swiftly departing footsteps.

"I am looking for Mr. Willfred Gray," he said.

"I am Willfred." She hesitated, trying to cover her confusion with dignity. "I should have written and told you, but we thought—I thought—you would not come, and it really did not matter."

"But it does matter a great deal," he interposed. "That black-tail—"

She smiled up at him, eyes full of sudden mirth.

"I gave it to the janitor."

"And my letter. Great Scott! I've always thought you were a boy, you know. Your father simply said he had named the baby after me, and I was

fingered the chain of one of the drinking ladies. The late afternoon sunshine shone on his bare head, giving a tinge of gold to the short cropped hair.

She looked at him with a quiet, happy satisfaction in her eyes. He was good to look at when one was tired, and somewhat lonesome.

He said at length, "You must answer me, Willfred. Even for Ralph's sake you should not refuse. Instead of this steady grind of work, you could send him to college, and give him the opportunities his father's son should have."

She shook her head.

"It may be right for Ralph. You are very kind to him, but what about his father's daughter?"

He answered her almost roughly. "I don't know. She is an independent young person, who positively refuses to accept her opportunities."

"The mine?"

"And its owner."

"If it were only the owner—"

He could hardly catch the words, but bent over her, crushing her hands in his grasp.

"Willfred, is it only the money that stands between, sweetheart?"

She looked up at him with troubled, tell-tale eyes.

"If there was not so much of it—"

"There'll only be half as much afterward. The rest goes to my partner."

An old man with a roll of music under his arm and a daffodil stuck in his threadbare lapel, descended the white stone steps leisurely, humming a bar or two of Mignon to himself.

"Now I stand in Beauty's bower, Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, tra-la-la-la—"

He stopped short at sight of two figures in the sunshine beside the fountain, and softly went back up the steps to the drive with smiling lips and retrospective eyes.

"Birds a-mating," he said, in a mumbled undertone, "God bless them all."